The USA Rated Next to Last in Childhood Well Being

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The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre released the Report Card 7 in February which scrutinized the well-being of children in economically advanced nations. The study measured well-being in six dimensions: material wealth, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviors and risks, and young people’s own subjective sense of well-being. Several main findings occurred that are important to the development of policies that improve the lives and overall welfare of children.

The United States and the United Kingdom are in the bottom third in five of the six dimensions, ranking second to last and last respectively. The United States ranks last in the dimension of health and safety for children. According to the report, no single dimension can be used by itself as a reliable measure for overall child well-being, and many OECD countries have widely varying rankings for the different dimensions. Of the 21 countries examined, the Netherlands ranked highest in sum. European countries dominated the top half of the rankings, with Northern Europe claiming the top four spots. However, the report concluded that all countries measured have weaknesses that need to be addressed.

The six dimensions measured were based on specific criteria. Material well-being measured relative income property, households without jobs, and reported deprivation. Health and safety looked at the health of those aged 0-1, preventative health services, and safety as measured by deaths from accidents and injuries per 100,000 for ages 0-19. For educational outcomes, criteria were school achievement at age 15, the percentage aged 15-19 remaining in education, and the transition to employment. The relationships statistic was determined by examining family structure, family relationships, and peer relationships. Behaviors and risks was based on health behaviors, risk behaviors, and experience of violence of children. The final dimension relied on young people’s own reporting of health, school life, and personal well-being.

The UNICEF Innocenti Report is intended as a first step in measuring and comparing children’s well-being in advanced nations. This information can be used to direct policy in these nations and open discussions about what is working and what is not. The well-being of children is increasingly important in our growing world, and public policy needs to address these issues aggressively and across a broad spectrum of aspects.

To view the full report: http://www.unicef-icdc.org/presscentre/presskit/reportcard7/rc7_eng.pdf

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